

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan praised teachers from around the state and country during a town hall meeting Tuesday afternoon at Bowie State University where local leaders, teachers, and students discussed the role of educators in America.

“I want to thank teachers for the extraordinary things that they do,” Duncan said. “I can’t overstate how critical great teachers are to society.”

The event was part of the Department of Education’s national teacher’s recruitment initiative, TEACH, which focuses on finding quality teachers for the next generation of students. An issue which will need to be addressed soon, according to Duncan.

“[The Department of Education] thinks that in the next 4 to 5 years, we are going to need over 1 million teachers in this country,” he said.

Congressman Steny Hoyer, (D-MD), Maryland Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, and Bowie State University President Mikey L. Burnim, as well as some prominent educators joined Duncan on the discussion panel.

Sixteen universities and colleges in the state have received over \$400,000 TEACH grant funds during the 2009-2010 academic school year, including Bowie State University and the University of Maryland-College Park.

Prospective teachers must commit to serving as a full-time teacher for 4 years in a high-need field and at an elementary or secondary school that serves low-income students.

Brown said that while Maryland is the number one ranked public school system in the country,

there is still progress to be made.

“I think we can all take pride in the progress that we're making in Maryland,” Brown said during the discussion. “But we should also be mindful that there is considerable work to be done.”

A major objective of the campaign is to encourage more minority students to pursue teaching as a profession, especially male minority students.

“Less than 2 percent of teachers today are African-American males,” Duncan said. “Less than 2 percent are Latino males.”

According to reports from the Maryland Department of Education, 11.4 percent of teacher in Prince George’s County are African-American men. 3.8 teachers African-American men in the state.

Prince George’s County Teacher of the Year RaeShauna Mboma, 2009 Maryland Teacher of the Year William Thomas and 2011 National Teacher of the Year Michelle Shearer also spoke and answered students questions at the event.

Thomas, an AP Government teacher at Dr. Henry A. Wise Jr. High School in Upper Marlboro, said even though he knows his opinion is biased, to him teaching is the best profession in the world.

“What is so rewarding is knowing that your touching lives every single day,” he said.